



## **Senator Jean Berkey**

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### **Committees:**

- Financial Institutions, Housing & Consumer Protection, Vice-Chair
- Government Operations & Elections, Vice-Chair
- Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education
- Transportation

# *Senator* **Jean Berkey**

## *2006 Legislative News*

Dear Neighbors,

Thank you for the privilege of serving as your state senator! The 2006 session was quite remarkable in many ways. Typically, 60-day sessions are used for minor course corrections. This year was different. We tackled many weighty issues including renewable fuels, sex offenders, primary elections, civil rights, medical malpractice, and unemployment insurance. It was an extremely productive two months.

However, one single issue dominated this past session: education.

Although we all agree that educating our children is important, we may sometimes disagree on the appropriate level of funding given other competing needs. I believe that education is the engine that drives Washington's economy and allows us to successfully compete in the emerging global marketplace. Proper funding will ensure that our students are prepared to take their place in society, and that business will stay in Washington because our school system produces graduates with the right skills and training.

As a member of the Senate Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education Committee, I am committed to creating a foundation for success that students can build upon throughout their lives. Consequently, this newsletter will focus on the accomplishments we made for the next generation: the budding doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers, electricians, and even senators who will soon enter the work force and help to build a better Washington.

Sincerely,

A blue ink signature of Jean Berkey, written in a cursive style.

Senator Jean Berkey

### WASL

The Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) becomes a high school graduation requirement beginning with this year's 10th-graders. We approved a study of why some students struggle

with the WASL and what alternatives best allow students to show their command of reading, writing and math skills.

To give options to students who struggle with traditional tests, we approved alternative assessments for students who have retaken the WASL at least once. The options are:

- a portfolio of student work;
- a set mathematics score on the SAT, PSAT or ACT;
- a comparison of grades with a group of peers who have passed the WASL; and
- the successful completion of a vocational program.

We appropriated \$28 million in the supplemental budget to fund intensive instruction for students who have not met state academic standards. These funds will allow schools to devote more time and resources to tutoring, before and after school programs, and summer school. We also provided \$3.4 million in remediation for students struggling with math.

Businesses need a well-educated work force to compete in the global marketplace. We must hold our schools accountable for the students they teach, and hold the students to a reasonable, real-world standard. Any attempt to weaken that standard ultimately does the student a disservice.



### Department of Early Learning

Spend just five minutes with a child and one thing becomes obvious: children love to learn. Research shows that high-quality early learning experiences are among the very best investments we can make to reduce future costs in special education, abuse and neglect, health care, school drop out rates, teen pregnancy, welfare and the criminal justice system.

Certainly parents are their children's first and most important teachers and decision-makers. But parents can benefit from support from others in ensuring that children get the best possible start in life. That's why we need to coordinate the many services and programs we offer for early learning to make sure we give our children a solid start.

We created a cabinet-level early learning department to consolidate the state's existing programs, and give parents better information about child care and preschool. By consolidating the management of early learning programs in a single, cabinet-level agency, we will give them the visibility and priority they need to help our children be successful.



### Teacher compensation

The budget includes \$15 million to make up for K-12 employees' cost-of-living adjustments that were deferred when I-732 was not funded in 2003. The budget also funds scholarships to steer teachers into the high-demand subject areas of math, science, special education and bilingual education, and \$1.5 million for higher education faculty increments.



### Education ombudsman

We reactivated the Center for Improvement of Student Learning within the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and established an education ombudsman within that center to serve as an information clearinghouse for parents and students on educational improvement and parental involvement programs.

### Higher education

Even in this supplemental budget year, we were able to invest in expanding higher education opportunities: nearly 500 new enrollments at our state's public colleges, universities, and community and technical colleges, including enrollments in high-demand fields; \$4.3 million for



life sciences research at the University of Washington and Washington State University-Spokane, and

providing start-up costs for the Life Sciences Discovery Fund; and \$3.2 million — plus a \$1.5 million tax credit — for workforce training.

### Everett Community College

At my request, another \$3.8 million was added to the capital budget for additional classroom space to house upper-division studies in the new EvCC Undergraduate Education Center. The budget also includes an additional 250 upper-division students at EvCC to expand access to flexible, affordable higher education.



### New four-year university

In 2005, the Legislature commissioned a two-year study to assess the higher-education needs of Snohomish, Island and Skagit counties. The report is due this December, and will guide us through future discussions concerning a new four-year university in our fast-growing and underserved region

### Apprenticeships

We must recognize that not all kids want to go to college, and that our state economy depends on skilled building and trades workers. Our public transportation projects are critical to keeping Washington's economy moving. We expanded our work force by putting more apprentices to work in the "helmets to hardhats" law that requires the state Department of Transportation to phase in their use over three years. This helps ensure a qualified work force in the future.



## 2006 — a banner year for education

As you can tell, the 2006 session was truly focused on the educational needs of the next generation of Washington citizens. I am committed to providing them with the opportunity for an excellent education, from preschool through college and beyond. By giving students the resources they need to succeed – and putting in place a system that recognizes students' strengths and interests while holding them to high academic standards – we are working toward providing our students with the world-class education system we know they deserve.

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